

Sacrifice and Covenant: A Study of the Early Development of Atonement Theology

Author: Bryan Bodien

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Sacrifice and Covenant:
A Study of the Early Development of Atonement Theology

Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the S.T.L. Degree
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By: Bryan Bodien
Directed by: Rev. Daniel J. Harrington, Ph.D.
Second Reader: Rev. Richard J. Clifford, Ph.D.

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General Introduction

A powerful and captivating theme throughout scripture is that of atonement. An act which seeks to gain atonement is itself part of a larger trajectory. This is essentially aimed at maintaining the proper relationship between God and humanity. Scripture presents two poignant cases of atonement, one being the Day of Atonement and the other the self sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through the course of this thesis I will speak to these two cases of atonement. There are three primary points of view from which I wish to present atonement: scripturally, historically and spiritually. These broad ideas themselves give way to larger issues regarding atonement, such as sin and covenant.

The ideas which I shall present in the course of this thesis are part of great area of interest for me. I understand atonement as lying at the heart of many theological concepts. Here begins my intense fascination with the topic. Are human beings themselves so inherently evil that sin is so rampant and thus, atonement a necessity? Although humanity is not itself inherently evil, it is in need of atonement. The choice to research this topic had come to me out of other interests as well. I have always had a deep fascination with ancient Israelite worship, the Jerusalem Temple and how key theologies passed from Judaism to Christianity. Christianity has in many ways flourished, spreading throughout the world, yet at its core lay many Jewish principles.

The correlation between sin and atonement is something which has held a strong part of the religious imagination for millennia. Sin is often described as holding humanity for ransom. The atonement brought about through temple sacrifices and, ultimately the sacrifice of Jesus

Christ severs the bonds of sin. Likewise it is because of human, sinful nature that atonement is needed. Understanding the human element in atonement adds depth, making it more than a mere concept but something deeply a part of humanity. Sin and atonement is one set of pairs in the larger framework of atonement theology. Two other important pairs include sacrifice and forgiveness, and death and resurrection. It is no accident that each of these pairs has a causative relation brought on by the dynamic nature of atonement.

Another unique set is the Christian and Jewish teaching on atonement. The research for this thesis has given me a greater appreciation for both theologies. Likewise, as I shall present the Christian teaching as new in itself as well as bearing a strong flavor of the Jewish concept of atonement.

The approach which I have taken towards atonement shows that the development of atonement theology has been a progression rather than something instantaneous. This progression however is unlike that of any other. It does not merely show growth or betterment, it shows fulfillment. The divine and cosmic work achieved in the New Testament, likewise maintains continuity with the beliefs of the Old Testament. Thus, the actions of Jesus are both something new and unique.

Christianity does itself an injustice to ignore the Jewish roots upon which it was built. I would however like to state that it is not my intention to heal all that has been separated. Yet to give adequate attention to topic, I feel these ideas must be addressed. Christians would gain a better and more complete understanding of atonement, if they were aware of the Jewish background. It would then be my hope that Christians see the sacrifice of Jesus as both encompassing as well as growing out of the Judaic view of atonement. This thesis does not seek

to answer all questions, for I realize atonement is an extremely comprehensive topic. I do however attempt to give explanation to the Christian teaching of atonement that does not downplay the value of the Jewish teaching. It is important to provide answers that are truthful, doctrinally sound, but do not fuel the fires of religious tensions.

As I have alluded to earlier, atonement is process in theological development but atonement itself is also a process in which it is played out. To understand this one must be mindful of the notion that atonement is not about bloody sacrifices; rather it is about maintaining a proper relation with God. This relation had an effect upon both the individual and a larger covenantal community. I explore the nature of the covenantal aspect of atonement from two perspectives; firstly that of the connection which the Day of Atonement had for the nation of Israel. Secondly, I examine how the self-sacrifice of Jesus would be one that established a new covenant.

It is this new covenant which although becoming a distinct entity, carries with it a long legacy. Atonement teaching within Christianity would be an area in which the church radically distinguished itself from Judaism. Thus, the effects of this atonement would be unique but the reason for which it was done was the same as Temple ritual.

I attempt, through the course of the thesis to present a systematic approach to atonement. The first chapter “A Tale of Two Goats” examines the atoning ritual spelled out in Leviticus 16. Here I give particular attention to the role of the two goats mentioned in the text. It is my belief that although each was designated for a very different task, both together was needed for the completion of the day’s ritual and for it to be effective.

The second chapter entitled “Encountering the Temple: Ancient and Modern Jewish Approaches to the Day of Atonement” offers a study into how the Day of Atonement was understood within Judaism over time. The key focus of this second chapter lies in the important role of the community of the people of Israel and the connection between the covenant and the Day of Atonement.

The third and final chapter “A New Offering: Jesus” takes a look at atonement from a Christian perspective. I have devoted a large portion to a careful analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This is an extremely important text for here, not only is Jesus Christ described as the sacrifice but the language used contrasts his offering with that of the atonement offering on the Day of Atonement. The material of this text provides the basis for seeing Jesus’ sacrifice as unique. This chapter wrestles with the very difficult issue of reconciling the Jewish and Christian views on atonement. Another notion taken up in this chapter is examining the continuity to which Jesus himself maintained with previous atonement theology.

The most significant aspect about atonement theology is that it has been a process which developed over time. Naturally, to understand it one needs to see the whole picture, biblical, historical, and spiritual. These three components (biblical, historical, and spiritual) came in at distinct periods in time. The first, the biblical, comes from the ritual narrative of Leviticus 16; not only does it tell the story of the Day of Atonement it sets the stage for later theological development. The Judaic view of atonement provides important insight as Jewish scholars looked back to the time of the Jerusalem Temple. The last place belongs to the Christian teachings on atonement, which gave a powerful spiritual center for Christians. The Christian

understanding is rather unique; on one hand it provides a sense of completion, yet remains in sync with the prior teachings of atonement.

Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Goats

Introduction

Through the course of this chapter it will be my intention offer a critical study of Leviticus 16; I will focus specifically upon what is most needed for the rituals of atonement to be done. This text in Leviticus portrays an elaborate series of rituals which were ideally intended to bring about the forgiveness of the sins of the people of Israel. The chapter is comprised of four sections which culminate in the addressing of two major concepts which are integral to the function of the Day of Atonement. The first section of the chapter is entitled “The Description of the Rituals”, draws attention to sacrificial actions. This part ends with the mention of the goat which is led away for Azazel. This is appropriately where the next section begins. The second section is thus called “Azazel”; as I seek to explain that both the name Azazel and the goat associated with it, have a deep meaning and one which is inseparable from the day itself. The next part of the chapter seeks to delve further into the ritual component by examining both rabbinic and modern scholarly sources. It is fitting then that this section is called “Ritual Redefined”, because I make use of writings from throughout history hoping to gain a grasp as to how these rituals were understood. The final section is where I attempt to bring everything together. The final section is entitled “Atonement and Cleansing”, and pulls together two essential aspects as to why these rituals were done and how they may be understood.

The reason that atoning and cleansing are of such an importance, is because they are behind the necessity for the rituals. The actions of Leviticus 16 have been traditionally understood as being done for the purpose of forgiveness. However, as I shall explain, there is a correlation between cleansing and atoning.

In short, an individual or collective desiring to set right particular wrongs that have been transgressed needs to not only make atonement, but be prepared for that action. To put this in other terms, is it sufficient for one who has sinned to simply apologize? Rather, the individual must do so with the proper attitude, and make every attempt not to repeat the wrong action. The same applies to the Day of Atonement; if forgiveness is to take place properly, sin must be removed. These two notions may sound similar, and although there is a similarity, they are in no way identical. The sins of Israel are removed in order that they, the people, attain forgiveness. The two goats which play a critical role in the text of Leviticus pertain to each of these two elements.

In an attempt to give a complete explanation towards my thesis, I will make the necessary distinctions between atonement and purification. The need for atonement is something characteristic of a broken relation. The manner of atoning aims to set that relationship right. Purification refers to the need to cleanse and remove the stain brought on by sin.

There are two principal manners in which atonement is defined through the Hebrew word *kipper*. One way of understanding atonement is as a ransom. The other explanation is blotting out the error.

“In Exodus 30:11-16, money is taken as ‘atonement’ or ‘ransom’ for the lives of the Israelites counted in the census. And in Numbers 35:29-34 no ransom is

allowed in exchange for the life of a convicted murderer. There also seems to be the likely meaning in Leviticus 17:11, where the blood of an animal is said to be its *nephesh*, or 'life', which God has given to make 'atonement' - that is as a ransom or exchange for the one who makes it."¹

It is the exact same form of *kipper* that is used in Exodus 30 and Leviticus 17. Based upon this definition it is seen that substitution is a major aspect in atonement. For example, an animal is sacrificed in place of human sin.

Connected to this is the idea of blotting out of sin. This definition of *kipper* has its root in an Akkadian cognate and is used in this style in Jeremiah. "In Jeremiah 18:23, *kipper* is paralleled to 'blot out' (when Jeremiah prays that God will *not* do this with the sins of his persecutors). And this seems to be the commonest sense in Leviticus, where the word is frequently used in the rituals of purging and cleansing."² Both proposed meanings for *kipper* are in no way contradictory with one another. They both simply refer to two different components in the ritual. Ransom is concerned with the one seeking atonement, while blotting out is tied to both removal and forgiveness of sin.

In fact this idea of viewing both definitions in harmony with one another is something picked up by Milgrom in his commentary on Leviticus.

"Atone' or 'expiate' is the customary translation for *kipper*, but in most cases this is incorrect. In biblical poetry its parallel synonym is usually *maha* 'wipe' (Jer 18:23) or *hesir* 'remove' (Isa 27:9) suggesting that *kipper* means purge. Ritual texts also support this meaning. Other poetic passages will use in parallel *kissa*

¹ Wright, Christopher. J.H. "The Atonement in the Old Testament" *The Atonement Debate. Papers From the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*. Howard Marshall. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2008). 75, 76.

² Wright, Christopher. J.H. "The Atonement in the Old Testament" *The Atonement Debate. Papers From the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement*. 76.

‘cover’ (Neh 3:37) giving the contrary notion that kipper connotes smearing on [of] a new substance instead of effacing an existing one.”³

Milgrom proceeds further to provide information that suggests that both the Arabic (to cover) and the Akkadian (to wipe) have their origin in the same root, meaning to rub. “Certainly in the ritual texts the meaning ‘rub off, wipe’ predominates. The blood of the sacrifices is literally daubed or aspersed on the sancta, thereby ‘rubbing off’ their impurities.”⁴ Defining the term as ‘rubbing’ creates a visual image much more intense and poignant than that of either covering or wiping.

As I have already stated, purification is the cleansing of sin and its effects. The sanctuary of the Jerusalem temple may not come into direct physical contact with sin, yet sin did have a potentially damaging effect on it. Sin is understood to contaminate and requires a cleansing (Leviticus 16:30).⁵

Before I proceed further, I would like to provide a brief overview of the actions which occur in Leviticus 16. The text as a whole has three principal sections; however within that it can be divided with even more detail to perhaps seven parts. The major areas consist of the following: verses 1-2 which deal with the death of Aaron’s sons, verses 3-28 are concerned with the need for atonement and how it will take place, while verses 29-34 give a command to make this feast something for all generations.

³ Milgrom, Jacob. *The Anchor Bible. Leviticus 1-16. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991). 1079-80.

⁴ Milgrom, Jacob. *The Anchor Bible. Leviticus 1-16*. 1081.

⁵ *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible*. Edited by Baruch J. Schwartz, David P. Wright, Jeffery Stackert, and Naphtali S. Meshel. “Sin and Impured: Atoned or Purified? Yes” Jay Sklar. (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2008). 25.

Although the second section deals with atonement it is a part which can be broken down in greater detail. The first several verses speak about the atonement being offered by the priest for his family. The second part within this motif, (which would be the third part of the chapter) is verses 7-10 which mention the two goats and their significance to the atonement ritual. The next two parts are ones which move in a unique manner. The fourth and fifth parts (vv 11-22) of the chapter begin by returning to the sacrifice for the priest and the people. It is within these sections in which the ritual is spelled as to how this takes place. Verse 22 stands out as special because it is this verse that explains that it is the goat “to Azazel” which bears the sins of the community. The sixth part (which ends the second larger theme of the need for atonement) 23-28 is concerned with ritual purity. There are certain cleansing rituals that are spelled out as needing to occur to the High Priest before returning to the community.

The third (or seventh) section of the chapter verses 29-34 gives a command that this festival should be kept as a yearly means of atonement. This final part is critical because it adds the covenantal element to the chapter. It proclaims the need for atonement from sin for the people of Israel for future generations.

The Description of the Rituals

One of the first items that becomes apparent in the reading of chapter 16 of Leviticus are the ritual actions performed on that day.

“ But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram

for a burnt offering. “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.” (Leviticus 16:3,5-6,8-10 ESV).

The text tells that there are three animals brought to the Temple that day, and they each serve an important role in the Day of Atonement. Through this first part, I will attempt to give some explanation of these complex actions.

The text later explains that the bull is to be sacrificed on behalf of Aaron and his house (vv 11-12).

“By unusual expression ‘house of Aaron’ must be meant the whole priesthood by reason of the fact that the priestly office was hereditary in one family. At all events in what follows there is a connection between this atonement of the priesthood, effected through the chief priest and probably from the beginning taking place once a year.”⁶

The high priest was to serve as an intermediary, offering this and the other sacrifices on behalf of the people. Thus, it was understandable, that the one who would fulfill this duty had atoned for his sin as well.

Essential to this second section from Leviticus, (vv. 11-19) is the theme of purification. The text makes specific reference to two cleanings, one for the sanctuary and the other for the

⁶ Noth, Martin. *Leviticus: A Commentary*. (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1965). 122.

people. These two actions for purification are necessary for understanding the Day of Atonement as it is written in the Biblical text.

“The purification of the sanctuary was thus completed in two stages, represented first by the bull and then by the he-goat...It represents the only instance in the priestly laws of the Torah in which sacrificial blood is brought into the Holy of Holies. God’s forgiveness, coming at the end of the expiatory process, can be anticipated only after the purification is satisfactorily accomplished”⁷

Important to see is that however different each rite was, both were in fact intertwined. The reason for this was that both rituals were needed.

Thus, there are two primary expectations which the Day of Atonement is to serve. Both of them are connected with maintaining holiness amid sin. The first ideal outcome of the performed rituals is the cleansing of the temple. This allows Israel as a people to continue to offer sacrifice before God. Although many sacrifices were made continually without a day set aside for intense purification, in the mind of the people, sin could accumulate thereby making it difficult to offer further sacrifice to God. The second element is to remove the sins of the people from the vicinity. Removal of sin may sound simple, but it is rather complicated. It entails the cutting off of anything that will block the filial relation of Israel to God.

“In the primordial liturgy of creation, God separated the dark from the light, thus creating a sacred zone where humans enact their divine commission to be stewards of God’s hopes and expectations for the world. Now, in this ritual re-creation, of the world God desires, Israel reenacts the separation between darkness and light that releases them once more from the malefic power of sin.”⁸

⁷ Levine, Baruch A. *Leviticus. The JPS Torah Commentary*. (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989). 103, 104.

⁸ Balantine, Samuel E. *Leviticus. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville,

This should serve as a testament to the great necessity which this day served in the worship of Israel. Thus, there are two key aspects of the expectations that were ideally achieved that day.

The theme of purification, as explained, I presented from the perspective of connecting the two sacrifices as playing a major role. Here I am referring to the sacrifice of the bull made by the priest for himself and his family and secondly the goat designated for the Lord. The text parallels and juxtaposes the role of the goat “for the Lord” and the role of the goat “for Azazel”. However, before this can be done, I will need to provide a more in-depth study of Azazel. I will examine the figure of Azazel through using the scriptural text, biblical scholars and the relevance to religion in the Ancient Near East. The connection which I am working towards is one between the goat “for Azazel” and the ritual component of purification of the sanctuary.

Azazel

At this point, I would like to take up task of study into Azazel^{9,10,11,12,13}. Azazel has come to be bound up with a large amount of mystery. “The figure of Azazel remains an enigma. People have usually seen in him a ‘desert demon’ that is satisfied by the sending of a he-goat and thus rendered harmless. The juxtaposition of Yahweh and Azazel would seem to justify this assumption.”¹⁴

⁸עֲזִיז עֵל: goat; עֲזִיזֵי עֵזִיז billy goats (with the pl. expressed twice) Ezr 6,17. The remainder of the word עֲזִיז meaning to go, to be sent. Thus, a common definition, “the goat that goes” or “the going goat.” Koehler, Ludwig, Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1945).

⁹לְעִזָּאזֵל *The Marginalia of the Targum Neofiti. The Complete Palstinian Aramaic Version of the Pentateuch*. From the files of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project. Stephen A. Kaufman editor-in-chief. (Hebrew Union College). Leviticus 16:8. This term could typically be read as “to or for Azazel” and that may not be incorrect, for it would in fact coincide with the MT לְעִזָּאזֵל. However, as one can plainly see, the spellings are different. The aleph being a letter with no traditional vocalic value assigned to it may represent one of two things; a scribal error in which the aleph was omitted or in fact indicate an earlier spelling of the term. The following term may also be relevant if in the case of a scribal error.

¹⁰עֵז adjective (definition: strong). Which is pronounced *az* as opposed to *ez* for “goat”. *Targum Lexicon. A Lexicon for the Aramaic Versions of the Hebrew Scriptures*. Stephen A. Kaufman editor-in-chief. (Hebrew Union College).

¹²לְעִזָּאזֵל

Targum Neofiti. Leviticus 16:8, understood as a proper name or place.

Targum Neofiti. The Complete Palestinian Aramaic Version of the Pentateuch. editor-in-chief, Stephen A. Kaufman. (Hebrew Union College). Leviticus 16:8.

¹³לְעִזָּאזֵל

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. 16:8, understood as a proper name or place.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. The Late Jewish Aramaic Version of the Pentateuch. editor-in-chief, Stephen A. Kaufman. (Hebrew Union College). Leviticus 16:8.

¹⁴Noth, Martin. *Leviticus: A Commentary*. 125.

explains, Azazel as a goat taking away evil. (Leviticus 16:26)¹⁵. However, the most common view held among scholars is that Azazel is a reference to a demon.

“This is the predominant view in midrashic literature, dating back to the early post biblical period. It is supported by (1) the parallel syntactic structures of the verse by which one goat is designated ‘for the Lord’, the other ‘for Azazel’, which implies that Azazel is the personal name of a divine being. (2) The wilderness to which the goat is dispatched (vv 10,22) is the habitation of demons. (3) 1 Enoch 10:4-5 relates that the angel Raphael is commanded to bind the rebellious demon ‘Azazel in hand and foot and banish him to a wilderness called Dudel (*Hududa* Yom 6:8) and cover him with sharp rocks. The most plausible explanation is that Azazel is the name of demon (no 3, above) who has been eviscerated of his erstwhile demonic powers by the Priestly legislators.”¹⁶

Scholars have debated over the meaning of Azazel and what role he plays in the divine drama of atonement. One understanding which is supported by the LXX translation which

The character of Azazel adds a special feature to Leviticus 16. Only after careful analysis of the manner in which Azazel has been interpreted will a clear picture of the text come into view.

Further study reveals that there may have been related rituals with goats and the removal of sin or infirmity in the Ancient Near East. “Purgation and elimination rites go together in the ancient world. Exorcism of impurity was not enough; its power must be nullified. This was accomplished one of three ways: curse, destruction or banishment.”¹⁷ What follows is an example of a similar Mesopotamian practice. Reading this one should bear in mind the differences between it and the ritual of the biblical text.

“In *Uttuke Limnuti* (lines 115-38), Ea instructs his son Marduk, on how to purify a patient beset by demons. Among the many rites a *mashultuppu*- goat is brought to the patient’s body and his head is bound with the animal’s head-band. The demons are exorcised by incantations. The incantations are followed by the removal of the *mashultuppu*’s skin from the patient’s body. This rite is clearly one of transfer on which the skin serves as the instrument that takes on the evil, and thereby the punishment.”¹⁸

¹⁵ χίμαρον τὸν διεσταλμένον. The first word χίμαρον comes from the term *XIMÁPOΣ* meaning “he-goat”. *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon. Founded upon the Seventh edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1945).

¹⁶ Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 1-16. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991). 1020-21.

¹⁷ Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus. A Book of Ritual and Ethics. A Continental Commentary.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004). 166.

¹⁸ Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus. A Book of Ritual and Ethics. A Continental Commentary.*

Naturally, both customs make use of a goat as the agent to which the evil or sin is ideally transferred. This particular rite involves direct contact between one individual and the goat, where in the biblical text there is an action done on behalf of the nation with a priest as an intermediary.

Then lots are cast over the two goats which have been brought. The text itself is rather unclear as to what this means or how it is done. It does however seem to imply that it is to create a distinction. “The lots, once determined, are to be placed literally on the heads of the goats so that they were not confused. In other words, the lots serve as their identification markers.”¹⁹ This is extremely important showing that there is not simply a theological meaning, but often a practical reason for what was done. The lots, according to Leviticus, indicate that the division went as such; one goat for the Lord and one for Azazel.

The manner to which the goats were selected to fulfill their role was understood as being the result of both something practical and divine providence. The rabbinic sages, who commented upon this text, believed that it was no accident that each goat would be selected for its chosen task. Here, the great Jewish scholar Rashi shows how this selection was to take place.

“He has one goat stand to the right and one to the left. He puts his two hands into a lottery box, and draws a lot in the right hand and draws the other lot in the left hand. He puts the lots on the [goats].²⁰ The one about which, i.e., on whose lot, is written ‘to Hashem’ is offered to Hashem, and the one about which, i.e. on whose lot, is written ‘to Azazel’ is sent to Azazel. When he puts the lots on it, he calls it by name, i.e. he declares it an offering, by saying ‘to Hashem a sin offering.’”²¹

¹⁹ Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 1-16. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. 1019.

²⁰ “The lot in his right hand on the goat standing at his right, and the lot in his left hand on the goat standing at his left.”

²¹ *The Torah With Rashi's Commentary. Translated, Annotated and Elucidated*. Rabbi Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg. (New York, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1994). 196.

The offering sent to Azazel was more complicated. Rashi references the wording of the text being that it is to be sent alive.

“Because it says, ‘to send it to Azazel’, and I do not know if its sending is for death or for life, i.e., if it is sent to Azazel to its death, or if it is to survive after it is sent. Therefore, it says, ‘[it] shall be stood alive,’ which implies, its sending takes place while alive, until it is sent away. From here we learn that its sending is for death, i.e., that it is sent to Azazel to its death.”²²

Rashi’s study leaves him to understand that the critical wording in the previous passage is the following: “until it is sent away.” It is from here that he is able to reach his conclusion that the goat remains alive while sent. However, its ultimate purpose is to die.

Despite the differing understandings on who or what Azazel was, the role of the goat is rather evident. A common explanation is that the goat for Azazel is sent out because the high priest has confessed the sins of the people over it. “If Azazel is taken to be the name of a demon that entices people to sin or the malign power that testifies against them on the Day of Atonement, then the scapegoat is cast into the wilderness (or in later interpretations, thrown off a cliff) rather than sacrificed in the usual manner to avoid violating the ban against sacrificing to demons.”²³ There is no doubt that this goat acted as an agent of removal. However, the extent to which this was enacted is something which I will take up later on.

The ideas of sin and atonement are extremely powerful notions and ones which have been widely written of throughout the history of the Hebrew Bible. Here, the focus turns to a more spiritual direction. Yet the rituals and the implementations of the rituals are tools by which the

²² *The Torah With Rashi’s Commentary. Translated, Annotated and Elucidated.* 197.

²³ *Etz Hayim. Torah and Commentary.* The Rabbinical Assembly. The United Conservative Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001). 681.

spiritual dynamics are reached. I shall also look overall as to how the understanding of the Day of Atonement has developed historically.

Ritual Redefined

The Day of Atonement is not something which is exclusively limited to the text of Leviticus 16. This has been an important topic, one which has earned the attention of both ancient and modern scholars. Here, I will explore this insight offered by modern and Rabbinic sources.

Most remarkably, the Mishnah gives a look to things that themselves are not specifically mentioned in the text of Leviticus 16. One such example of this, are the passages which concern themselves with the actions of the high priest before the service. The text of Leviticus is rather ambiguous regarding how the goat “for Azazel” is handled (i.e. what exactly is done with this goat). However, what follows is a recreation of what was believed to have been the prayer of confession over the goat.

“He comes to the goat which is to be sent forth and lays his two hands on it makes the confession: ‘O Lord, your people, the house of Israel, has committed iniquity, transgressed and sinned before you. *Forgive, O Lord I pray the iniquities, transgressions and sins, which your people the house of Israel committed, transgressed, and sinned before you.*”²⁴ (Yoma 6:2).

This prayer is something itself not mentioned in the biblical text. The words of this prayer offer a powerful insight into the understanding of the Day of Atonement. It is direct petition for pardon

²⁴ *The Mishnah A New Translation*. Jacob Neusner. (New Haven: CT, Yale University Press, 1988). 275.

and forgiveness from the Lord to Israel his people. Further study of the Mishnah gives a sense of the uniqueness of the day.

Tradition has taught that it was on the Day of Atonement that the high priest mentioned the divine name of God. This was the only day of the year upon which it was mentioned. Fitting with this, the Mishnah offers a glimpse as to how this was done.

“And the priests and the people standing in the courtyard, when they would hear the Expressed Name [of the Lord] come out of the mouth of the high priest, would kneel, and bow down and fall on their faces and say: ‘Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom forever and ever.’”²⁵ (Yoma 6:2).

This shows that (despite how minor) there was in fact participation from others than the high priest. This is fitting with the notion that the day belongs to the people as a whole.

Most importantly, the Mishnah provides some insight as to how the day was understood regarding individual and corporate sin and forgiveness.

“A sin offering and an unconditional guilt offering atone. Death and the Day of Atonement atone when joined with repentance. Repentance atones for minor transgressions, [repentance] suspends the punishment until the Day of Atonement comes along and atones.”²⁶ (Yoma 8:8).

Further, the Mishnah illustrates that the Day of Atonement is active between man and God primarily. The communal aspect of the day is something which modern scholars have written of as well.

“The expiation of the priests and of the sanctuary takes places for the good of the congregation. Sacrifices for ‘the people’ are anticipated from the very beginning

²⁵ *The Mishnah A New Translation*. Jacob Neusner. 275.

²⁶ *The Mishnah A New Translation*. Jacob Neusner. 278-79.

(vv. 5, 24). The scapegoat rite is a heavily symbolic, collective ceremony and expressly includes a penitential prayer for all believers.”²⁷

The liturgical rites performed that day had two primary objectives as I have attempted to explain: the atonement of sin and the cleansing of the sanctuary. The covenantal nature is something that can never be divorced from either one.

Yet, according to scholars this view of how the Day of Atonement functioned was not always apparent. The following statement, from Bible scholar James Kugel shows that the worship as depicted in Leviticus was itself a development.

“As for the Day of Atonement, scholars have noted that this holiday exists only in what they identify as priestly writings. It is never mentioned in the book of Exodus or in the calendar of holidays in Deut. 16:1-17; as far as these books were concerned there was no such holiday. Originally, the Day of Atonement was not an all Israelite holy day devoted to atoning one’s sins. Rather it was at first a strictly priestly observance, a procedure by which priests purged the sanctuary after it had been defiled.”²⁸

Kugel further points out in that same book, that only later did this become a set day of worship and it would be even later that it would become understood as day for the entire people of Israel. Kugel and others believe that the origins of this day have roots in similar Canaanite practices. Kugel gives reference to the fact that similar atonement rituals accompanied by equally similar agents (i.e. goats) were used in nearby Canaanite culture. What made this practice distinct is its understanding as an Israelite rite. Thus, the rituals were seen in conjunction with the covenant between Israel and their God.

²⁷ Gerstenberger, Erhard. S. *Leviticus. A Commentary*. (Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). 232.

²⁸ Kugel, James L. *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now*. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2007). 325.

I will now turn my attention to completing the connection between the necessities for the Day of Atonement, specifically as related to the two goats. Each of the two goats serves a purpose which can never be separated from the purpose which the day itself had served. Thus, it is understandable as to why the two goats are juxtaposed to one another in the text of Leviticus.

Atonement and Cleansing

The proper function of the Day of Atonement had two components, purgation and atonement. Although I have previously mentioned them, now I will attempt to make the connection between them.

The reason for which each goat is selected is quintessential for understanding the day as a whole. The function that both provided individually is imperative in order for the day to be complete. “Two weighty atonement rites thus occupy the center of the early Jewish day penance: a bloody ceremony intended to purify the priests, the people and the sanctuary, and place them into a new condition of grace; and the dispatching of a scapegoat that carries the entire load of guilt in a physical-symbolic fashion.”²⁹ The sacrificed goat fulfills the role of atonement, while scapegoat fulfills the role of purification.

As I explained earlier, this purification is one that is intended to cleanse the sanctuary. Without this removal, however symbolic the ritual of the scapegoat may appear, it would be

²⁹ Gerstenberger, Erhard S. *Leviticus. A Commentary*. 222.

difficult for any offerings to be performed. The sins of the people could continue to pile up, bringing defilement into the sanctuary.³⁰

“Through transgressions against the commandments, the community of faith was continually heaping guilt upon itself; and because God dwelled in his house in the midst of this flawed and guilt ridden people, some portion of the substance of that sin was bound to come in contact with and taint the sanctuary despite all cautionary measures. The high priest, completely alone, performs the purificatory rites in the interior of the temple ‘for himself, for his family, and for the entire congregation of Israel’ (v. 17). This verse probably originally belonged to the description of the atonement rites in vv. 12-15, though it is now forced (and for all practical purposes neutralized) into the reinterpretation of the ceremony on the day of penance in vv. 16-18f., which presents the purgation of the sanctuary itself as being more urgent.”³¹

The sanctuary of the temple was the dwelling place of God, and thus it could not be a place which was defiled in any manner. Through the aforementioned passage, one can see the role of cleansing and purification remains present nonetheless.

In short, the efficacy of the Day of Atonement was bound up with the completion of all of the needed liturgical actions. The main components of course, as I have stated, are purgation and atonement. The initial sacrifice made by the high priest, (the bull) began a complex and intricate spiritual cleansing of the sanctuary. This cleansing would in effect continue with the scapegoat being banished.

“People do not have to be in the sanctuary area for this pollution to occur; it occurs aerially. This pollution follows a graded scheme according to the gravity of the impure situation. The more severe the sin or impure situation, the more extensively the sanctuary is polluted. Intentional sins and presumably other unrectified sins and impurities pollute the adytum and the *kappōret* and implicitly the ark. The implication following from this is that were the sanctuary left sullied by these impurities, God’s presence, which manifests itself in the tent, could not dwell there and would leave (cf. Ezekiel 8–11)”

³⁰Freedman, David Noel. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Volume 2. 73.

³¹Gertsenberger, Erhard. *S. Leviticus. A Commentary*. 218.

“the pollution and burden produced by human sin produce[d] many trajectories requiring that the process of expiation address these different trajectories. The blood rites in the sanctuary and at the altar cleanse these holy instruments from the pollution reached by sin, while the goat bears the guilt and the burden produced by sin away from the congregation. In any case, the rites of this day indicate that both the sprinkling of the blood in the Holy of Holies and the release of the goat to Azazel are necessary for full expiation of the community from all the consequences of their sins.”³²

At this point, it would become apparent that the sins of Israel had been physically taken out of the sacred space. It would be here that the other goat “for the Lord” was offered as a sacrifice.

Cleansing has, in effect, paved the way for atonement. How could the offering which was to be made for the sins of the people, be done under the auspices of a sanctuary which has not been cleansed? Perhaps to fully understand the answer an individual needs also think of the other angle as well. Is atonement something which is needed for the removal of sin? Naturally, the answer to both questions is “yes”. Both rites must have taken place for the worship of the day to have been complete.

Conclusion

The Day of Atonement as it is mentioned in Leviticus 16 is characterized by the complex rituals which are involved. Throughout time, the understanding of these rituals has varied in explanation. What has not varied is of course the meaning of the day. The text in Leviticus 16 describes these rituals at length. In short, three animals are brought to the Temple that day, a

³²Hartley, John E. *Leviticus. Word Biblical Commentary*. (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1992). 237.

bull sacrificed by the priest for his sin, a goat sacrificed for the atonement of the whole people of Israel and another goat which is removed from the community to Azazel.

Azazel is used as a proper name in Leviticus 16: similarly the idea of who or what Azazel is has been the subject of much debate. Often Azazel has been defined as a demon, and it is to him that goat bearing the sins of the community is taken. Thus, the goat for Azazel serves an extremely important purpose, because it is bound with the complete removal of the sins of people.

Descriptions of this ritual are not limited to Leviticus 16. Through this chapter, I have made use of modern scholarly writing, rabbinic sources and material from *Mishnah Yoma*. This particular text from the Mishnah gives great insight to the day, mentioning both liturgical and spiritual aspects which are not directly stated in Leviticus 16. Yet, the Mishnah states the importance of the two most crucial actions, the atonement and the removal of sin.

These two elements, atoning and removing sin, are the most definitive actions associated with the Day of Atonement. These two elements together are what give the day its efficacy. Through the removal of sin, a cleansing action takes place. The cleansing and atoning are not only needed for the Day of Atonement, but it is these which bring completion to the day's rituals.

Chapter 2: Encountering the Temple:
Ancient and Modern Jewish Approaches to the Day of Atonement

Introduction

The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) is an extremely powerful day in the Jewish liturgical cycle. The very name itself reveals the focal point, atonement. Traditionally, the Day of Atonement has been understood as the day when all of the sins of the people of Israel are forgiven. It is my intention through the course of this chapter, to explain different aspects of the Day of Atonement with particular attention to Israel's covenant with the Lord. The atonement brought about this day is one that reaffirms this covenant.

There are four sections of the chapter. The first section entitled, "A Starting Point", is where I present basic information on the day. I begin with a biblical reference point for the Day of Atonement and proceed to discuss various ideas surrounding the Temple and ancient worship. The next section, "The Main Themes of the Day of Atonement", takes a more spiritual turn. Here, I focus on the ideas of forgiveness and repentance. "The Ritual of Atonement" is the third section and looks at both the worship of the Temple and today. It is important to juxtapose different periods showing similarities amongst change. The final section, "The Purpose of Atonement" returns to the idea of covenant. Here, I show how the covenant has played a major role and is itself at the center of the day.

Just as Israel can never be separated from its covenant with God, so too the worship and beliefs can never be separated from this covenant as well. Yes, it would be true to say that every

aspect of Jewish life is covenantal; however the Day of Atonement has a uniquely heightened sense of covenant. Whether in the Temple sacrifices, through contemporary prayers or beliefs about Yom Kippur, national atonement is at the heart of the day.

A Starting Point

The formulae for the worship of the Day of Atonement ³³

כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֹר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ:³¹
 שִׁבְתָּ שַׁבְתוֹן הִיא לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת־נַפְשֵׁיכֶם חֲקַת עוֹלָם:³² וְכָפַר הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר־יִמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ
 וְאֲשֶׁר יִמְלֹא אֶת־יָדוֹ לִכְהֹן תַּחַת אָבִיו וְלָבַשׁ אֶת־בְּגָדֵי הַבָּד בְּגָדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ: וְכָפַר אֶת־מִקְדָּשׁ
 הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יִכָּפֹר וְעַל הַכֹּהֲנִים
 וְעַל־כָּל־עַם הַקָּהָל יִכָּפֹר:³³ וְהִיְתָה־זֹאת לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְכָפֹר עַל־בְּנֵי
 יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל־חַטֹּאתֶם אַחַת בַּשָּׁנָה וַיַּעַשׂ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:³⁴

“For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the LORD. It shall be a Sabbath of solemn of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial; it is a law for all time. The priest who has been anointed and ordained to serve in place of his father shall make expiation. He shall put on the linen vestments, the sacred vestments. He shall purge the innermost Shrine, and he shall purge the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and he shall make expiation for the priests and all the people of the congregation. This shall be to you a law for

³³ One of the most intricate manners through which the Day of Atonement can be defined is through the terminology. *Yom Kippur* is the name for the Day of Atonement in Hebrew; *yom* of course means day, however *Kippur* is more difficult to define. The word has its root in the Hebrew verb *k-p-r*. It was once believed that the term had its root in an Arabic verb meaning to cover. “The derivation from Arabic ‘cover’, however has been discredited over the last few decades in favor of one from an Akkadian cognate term meaning ‘to wipe off’.

Watts, James W. *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 130-31.

³⁴ MT *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977).

all time, to make atonement for the Israelites for all of their sins once a year.” And Moses did as the LORD commanded him. (Leviticus 16:30-34).³⁵

This set of verses, however, is concerned with why these rituals were done and moreover, that they were to be kept as a practice for the people of Israel. It explains that once a year, a day was to be kept for atoning the people’s sins. Consequently, it is important to study how this day would be kept throughout history and how exactly different scholars understood this.

Returning to the aforementioned verses from Leviticus³⁵, is found in Leviticus 16. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the meaning of the final verses, particularly as they relate to the previous actions in the chapter, as I had mentioned. Verse 30 explains that atonement is made keeping this holy day. The previous sections of the chapter speak about the ritual which was performed in for all. However, the allusion is made to the ritual elements which were previously mentioned. the time of the Temple.

“This verse introduces purification of the people. (Until this time, the purification of the sanctuary had been the object of the various rites.) It is probably for this reason that the verse enjoys such a prominence in the liturgy of Yom Kippur until this day.”³⁶ Within this small set of verses, there is much which is revealed about the intent of the day.

A major point to clarify is that the ritual prescriptions as spelled out in Leviticus were written with the consideration for the Temple. The Temple has not served a pivotal role in the liturgical life of Israel since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. One important source for ritual descriptions is the writings of Philo of Alexandria³⁷. He lived in Egypt and had no connection with the priestly aspect of worship in Jerusalem, although he was alive at the time sacrifices were being offered in the Temple.

³⁵ *The Jewish Study Bible*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁶ Levine, Baruch A. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989). 109.

³⁷ Philo 20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.

Historically, the sacrificial system was a central aspect of Jewish life and worship in ancient Israel. Naturally, any sacrifice that was to be made on Yom Kippur was a pivotal part of the temple institution. The sacrifices that were made that day were to bring the people into a right relation with God. The sins which the people have committed were forgiven and the nation asserted its devotion to the Lord. The following comes from Philo of Alexandria and gives profound insight to the ritual sacrifices.

“Therefore he declared that since it was a feast the sacrifices should be the same number as those of the feast which begins the sacred month: a young bull, a ram, and seven lambs. In this way he mixed the number one with the number seven and lined the end up with the beginning, for the number seven has been appointed the end of things and the number one the beginning. He added three sacrifices since it was for purification. For he ordered that two he goats and a ram be offered. Then he said that it was necessary to offer the ram as a whole burnt offering, but to cast lots for the he-goats. The he goat selected by lot for God must be sacrificed, but the other was to be sent out into a pathless and inaccessible desolate place carrying on himself the curses of those who had committed offenses, but who were purified by changes for the better and who have washed themselves from their old lawlessness with a new sense of loyalty to the law.”³⁸

Not only does Philo recount the liturgical actions of the high priest³⁹, he also offers, through the last sentence, an idea of how he sees a type of purification taking place. Those who have sinned have returned to the law. This text of his writing stands as the testament of one living in the time of the Temple and writing about it.

³⁸*The Works of Philo : Complete and Unabridged* . translated by C. D. Yonge, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993). 551.

³⁹ There are perhaps one significant comment about Philo’s writing style which should be mentioned. It may appear as though he diverges off the main track by placing such a value on numerical values. Philo was a product of the Hellenistic world and his writing reflects this being put in a lofty manner with poetic imagery. Although this not uncommon for Philo, it no way takes away from his states on the ritual offerings.

The Main Themes of the Day of Atonement

There are a plethora of spiritual and theological ideas associated with the Day of Atonement. Two of the most common themes include: repentance and forgiveness. This is a time when Israel reflects upon their sins and seeks to reaffirm a relation with God.

Yom Kippur is characteristically defined by its solemnity within Jewish worship. It carries with it, of course, a theme of repentance. The following poem, from an unknown author reflects the awesomeness which this day holds. “Like the clay in the hand of the potter who thickens it at his will so we are in Thy hand, gracious God, forgive our sin, Thy covenant fulfill.”⁴⁰ The author, drawing upon biblical imagery from Jeremiah, understands the people as the vessel and God as the potter.

Some have written of Yom Kippur as having a strong eschatological component.

“Yom Kippur is a reflection of the World to Come, when perfection will return to the world with a new heaven and earth. And God gives us the opportunity, just as on every Sabbath to taste the coming world.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Goodman, Philip. *The Yom Kippur Anthology*. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1971) 64.

⁴¹ Braun, Moshe A. *The Jewish Holy Days: Their Spiritual Significance*. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996). 57.

The previous statement gives one a taste of one view within Judaism. It is understood to be a day which is outside the ordinary realm of time. Although the day itself has its traditional origins in Leviticus 16, there are many stories as to how the day came into existence.⁴² One such story concerns itself with the building of the Golden Calf.⁴³ Another common story claims this was the day that Abraham was circumcised. Essentially, all stories like this connect the origin of the Day of Atonement to a moment in the history of Israel when the people, (or a major figure), was caused to repent and change from a previous path.

Although the worship surrounding the day is very much different now than in the time of the temple, the important themes have remained. Sin and repentance are major themes of the Day of Atonement.

“The Divine Service that we recite on Yom Kippur begins with an account of the Creation and recounts the sin of Adam and his banishment from Gan Eden. The entire world remained desolate until Avraham came and filled the earth with light.

⁴² “Our sages tell us that the heavenly response for Yom Kippur is so strong that the day is not even part of the natural year. It is totally removed from physical time, the year of 365 days. And during the 365 natural days, the Satan has dominion and influence, except on Yom Kippur, a day apart from nature”. Braun, Moshe A. *The Jewish Holy Days: Their Spiritual Significance*. 57.

It should be noted that either the author is using 365 as referring to the secular calendar and not the Hebrew Calendar. This could be either an attempt to simplify in common vernacular terminology or a mistake on the author’s part.

⁴³ “The day before the seventeenth of *Tamuz*, the Satan worked hard to mislead the Jewish people and he did. He showed them an image of Moses lying a bed lifeless. This led them to build an image of the Golden Calf. Moses broke the tablets, as the Satan had planned, so that the Jewish people did receive them...On the day before the tenth of *Tishrei* when Moses was scheduled to come down with the second tablets, the people were cautious...They repented and prayed.”
Braun, Moshe A. *The Jewish Holy Days: Their Spiritual Significance*. 65.

He bore Yitzchak, who was a pure offering, unblemished by sin, who in turn bore Ya'akov, who was wholehearted in his service of God, and who bore the twelve tribes who were sanctified from the womb. From among their children, Levi was chosen to offer the service and from among his children Ahron was chosen to serve as kohen –sacrificing and bringing atonement for all the sins of his people, rectifying the sins of earlier generations.”⁴⁴

This provides a great spiritual insight into the depth of the Day of Atonement. This explains a look through history as to how the need for atonement arose. The need for atonement coupled with the method in which it was conducted has long been the subject of much interest.

The twelfth century scholar Maimonides gave important insight into both repentance and the Day of Atonement. “At this time, when the Temple no longer exists and we have no atonement altar, there is nothing left but repentance. Repentance atones for transgressions.” (*Mishneh Torah, The Laws of Repentance*, 1:3).⁴⁵ The word in Hebrew which Maimonides uses is תשובה (*teshuvah*). The important aspect of the word is that it places emphasis on the action of the inner heart.

Understanding the Day of Atonement as being something more than simply sacrificial offerings is not a new idea. There are voices from among the prophets that true atonement is about repentance and forgiveness. “The prophets insisted that sacrificial rites alone cannot reconcile a human being to God. They held that sins are forgiven only if the sinner experiences a change of heart leading to a change of ways.”⁴⁶ This is all brilliantly underscored by the Jewish

⁴⁴ Kitov, Eliyahu. *The Book of Our Heritage: The Jewish Year and its Days of Significance*. Volume 1 Tishri-Shevat. Translated by Nachman Bulman. (New York, NY: Feldheim Publishers, 1997).103.

⁴⁵ *Maimonides' Mishneh Torah*. (New York, NY: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1967). 36.

⁴⁶ *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. edited by W. Gunther Plaut. (New York, NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981). 861.

concept of *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is a return to Torah. It is more than simply repentance, it is renewal.

The key feature of this repentance is that it should be honest and sincere. It would be considered a severe offense for an individual to purposely choose not to take this seriously. Temple-era texts record no demands as such that were placed on the people. The ritual fasting that was done on behalf of the whole nation, but every person within the nation has a responsibility. One manner that this was in fact present in the time of Temple was the Temple tax paid by all Israelites, even those in Diaspora. The people had the responsibility of following God's law, while the priest offered sacrifices for those transgressions that were made by himself as well as the people. The following stands as a rabbinic authority on the seriousness of repentance.

“He who says, ‘I shall sin and repent, sin and repent, they give no chance to do repentance.’ I will sin and the Day of Atonement will atone.’ The Day of Atonement will not atone. For transgressions between man and the Omnipresent, the Day of Atonement atones. For transgressions between man and man, the Day of Atonement atones, only if the man will regain the good will of his friend.” (Yoma 8:9)⁴⁷.

Individuals are not forgiven if they have not atoned privately to the one they wronged. Such a case is not covered by prayers of the Day of Atonement.

Rabbinic sources themselves often differ as to how the forgiveness takes place. Depending upon interpretation, some place emphasis on God as providing forgiveness, while others focus on the sincerity of an individual's repentance.

⁴⁷ Neusner, Jacob. *The Mishnah. A New Translation*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988). 279.

“As to violation of a positive commandment [the Day of Atonement effects atonement] even if the person did not repent. As to violation of a negative commandment-R. Samuel in the name of R. Zeira, “[the Day of Atonement effects atonement] only if the person repented [of violating the negative commandment].” (Yerushalmi Yoma 8:7)⁴⁸.

Based upon this, one can also see that it also depends as to whether an individual has violated a positive or a negative commandment. Whether it has been a positive or negative command which has been violated, atonement is made nonetheless. Closely related to this subject, is that of impurity.

It is important to understand the larger issues concerning the ritual components of the Day of Atonement, one being impurity. There are two types of impurity, ritual and moral. Although both are ultimately interconnected they are seen as applying to very different matters. “While ritual impurity is generally not sinful, moral impurity is a direct consequence of sin. While ritual impurity results in an impermanent defilement, moral impurity leads to a long-lasting, if not permanent, degradation of the sinner and, eventually, of the land of Israel.”⁴⁹ A case of ritual impurity could be forgiven by several methods including either a cleansing of the individual, and a return to the community after a period of time.⁵⁰ A case of moral impurity could

⁴⁸ *The Talmud of the Land of Israel. A Preliminary Translation and Exposition*. Volume 14, *Yoma*. Jacob Neusner, General Editor. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). 228.

⁴⁹ *The Jewish Study Bible*. “Concepts of Purity in the Bible.” Jonathan Klawans. 2045.

⁵⁰ This expression, “period of time” has reference to the time until a person was allowed to return to the Temple.

be atoned through sacrifice. Thus, the Day of Atonement was a necessity.^{51, 52, 53} Likewise, there is much Rabbinic material that makes equally sharp distinctions regarding themes of atonement.

A major issue of Rabbinic thought and writing was the value the Temple held in Judaism since its destruction. Without the temple, there would no longer be the elaborate service as detailed in Leviticus 16. Thus, very often rabbis sought to explain atonement by other methods than sacrifice. “You might think that the Day of Atonement does not atone without the sacrifices and the goat: it does (Sifra 102a). What is important to notice is that the Day of Atonement tended to lose its magical or mechanical power.”⁵⁴ It is not then the ritual formula wherein the Day of Atonement draws its meaning and efficacy. One manner by which the rabbis would give meaning to the Day of Atonement is through prayer. A day which had once been defined by sacrifice and temple ritual was now set apart by prayer and fasting⁵⁵. Prayer came to be understood as both a substitute for and even being equal to the temple sacrifices.

⁵¹ Thus, if there was no repentance from sins of moral impurity, the sanctuary itself could become potentially defiled. Without a cleansing taking place it would be as if sins of moral impurity had an overloading effect on the sanctuary.

⁵² “Persons and objects are defined by four possible states: holy, common, pure and impure. Two of them can exist simultaneously: pure things may be either holy or common, common things may be pure or impure. However, the holy may not come into contact with the impure”

Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus, edited by M.J. H.M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz. “The Dynamics of Purity in the Priestly System.” by Jacob Milgrom. (New York, NY: Brill Press, 2000). 29.

⁵³ *People of the Covenant. An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Henry Jackson Flanders, Jr., Robert Wilson Crapps, David Anthony Smith. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996). 210.

⁵⁴ *A Rabbinic Anthology: Selected and Arranged with Comments and Introductions*. C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe. (London, England: Macmillan and Co., 1938). 238-39.

⁵⁵ Although fasting was a Biblical mandate. Lev. 16:31.

Closely related to this is the theme of salvation⁵⁶. Rabbinic writings often draw a parallel between the action of God on the Day of Atonement and his actions of salvation for his people throughout history.

“Said R. Samuel b. R. Nahman, ‘Said the Holy One, blessed be He, This wicked man will not leave this world before he declares sentence against himself from his own mouth.’ ‘Said the enemy, I will pursue, [I will overtake].’ We will overtake is not written here, but rather, ‘I will be pursued, I will be overtaken.’ ‘My desire will have its fill of them’ is not written here, but rather, ‘My desire will have its fill for him.’ [The meaning is that] they will desire for him. ‘I will put my sword’ is not written here, but rather, ‘I will draw my sword.’ [meaning], ‘I will leave my sword white in them [doing them no injury].’ ‘My hand will destroy them’ is not written here, but rather, ‘My hand will cause him to inherit.’ [The meaning is,] ‘I shall give him over as an inheritance [all of] my wealth and honor.’” (*Leviticus Rabbah*, 21:1.2)⁵⁷

Despite the complexity of this passage, its message is rather simple. According to Rabbi Samuel, the plans of the wicked man will not come to fruition. This will not happen because of God’s intervention. “The past history of Israel serves as a metaphor for the human condition of the Israelite, facing a supernatural enemy, saved by God’s favor. The Day of Atonement is a day of national salvation from enemies in this world and the world above.”⁵⁸ The Day of Atonement has an encompassing nature about it, which can be seen in the aforementioned quotation.

The sacrifices that were made were done to atone for sins, both of the high priest and the nation. An important question needs to be raised: although the temple no longer occupies a

⁵⁶ The theme of salvation is not something common to mainstream Judaism. However, an idea of the future fate has worked its way into folkloric beliefs. By this, the fate of both the individual and the community was bound and sealed on the Day of Atonement.

⁵⁷ Neusner, Jacob. *The Judaism Behind The Texts: The Generative Premises of Rabbinic Literature. III The Later Midrash Compilations: Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah and Pesiqta deRab Kahana*. (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994). 147.

⁵⁸ Neusner, Jacob. *The Judaism Behind The Texts: The Generative Premises of Rabbinic Literature. III The Later Midrash Compilations: Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah and Pesiqta deRab Kahana*. 146.

central place in Jewish worship, does this mean sacrifice no longer does as well? It should be noted that there are differing opinions. There are some within Judaism who look towards a time of a new Temple, and thus, hope for the return of sacrificial worship. However, there are many who object to sacrifices.

Objections to sacrifice are reflections coming from a modern society, where all life is special, for the source of life is God. Joshua Berman, in his book “The Temple” points out four primary objections to animal sacrifice. “1. *The sacrifices seem mechanistic and meaningless.* 2. *The depictions of them emphasize gore, not grandeur.* 3. *The notion that God ‘smells’ and ‘eats’ sacrifices seem, pagan.* 4. *It is morally wrong to kill an animal as an expression of religious feeling.*”⁵⁹ Berman then draws the reader’s attention to a sharp distinction between the Hebrew word *korban*⁶⁰ and sacrifice. A complete reading of Leviticus reveals that there are several types of offerings. For the purposes of this paper, I will examine the sin offering (*chatat*).

“The term *chatat* is often translated as ‘sin-offering,’ implying that it is derived from the word *cheit*, meaning ‘sin’ or transgression.’ The correlation between the word *cheit* and the *korban* that it engenders, a *chatat*, is substantiated by the set of circumstances that most commonly mandate a *korban chatat*: the inadvertent violation of a transgression due to inattention.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Berman, Joshua. *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995). 112, 113, 114.

⁶⁰ The word *korban* (pl. *korbanot*) comes from the root *k.r.b.* meaning ‘close’. The word *korban* literally means ‘that which has been brought close,’ and it refers to something that enters into God’s presence in the Sanctuary. Because the word *korban* bears different connotations than the word *sacrifice*, our discussion will favor the use of the term *korban* or, when need be offering in place of *sacrifice*.
Berman, Joshua. *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*. 116.

⁶¹ Berman, Joshua. *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now*. 120.

Such an understanding of offering applies directly to the Day of Atonement. Thus, the two offerings⁶² on the Day of Atonement were *korban chatat*. The offerings which were made on that day were done for the purpose of rectifying laws which have been violated accidentally.

The Ritual of Atonement

In this section, it will be my intention to examine the ritual at two distinct periods, ancient and modern. When referring to ancient ritual, I am of course speaking of the time of the Temple. Regarding the modern period, I will look at prayers translated into English within the 20th century. The particular prayers I intend to focus on are timeless, in that they capture the essence of the Day of Atonement.

The text *Mishnah Yoma* from the *Mishnah* serves as an additional resource to the Biblical text. Since the *Mishnah* was composed after the destruction of the Second Temple it is something that projects forward and backward in time simultaneously. It looks to the time when the Temple played a prominent role in Jewish life, and perhaps looks forward to the time of another temple.

Two major aspects to which I would like to draw attention to are the offerings made and the reason for them, the forgiveness of sins. The following draws upon both the biblical and mishnaic accounts in the attempt at explaining the actions of the high priest.

⁶² Based upon the text of Leviticus 16 it is evident that there are three animals brought to the Temple, and two of them are labeled as *chatat*. The chatat offerings are the bull (vv. 11, 27) which is made for the sin of the priest, and the goat which is 'for the Lord' (v.15). It is rather difficult to figure what type of designation the goat 'for Azazel' is given. The text refers to this goat both as bearing the sins of the people and being lead out to the wilderness alive. (vv. 21,22). An ambiguity also lies within the order to which the text presents the actions as taking place. Essentially verses 11-19 describe the ritual of the sacrifices. Verses 20-28 are either speaking of what follows this action or are a reflection of later editing.

“He would then put on the white clothing, consecrate his hands and feet, offer the ox as a sin offering, and cast the lottery over the goats- selecting one as an offering and one to be sent away. He would then tie the scarlet strip and sprinkle incense inside the Holy of Holies together with the blood of the ox and the goat. The *Kohen Gadol* would pronounce the ineffable Divine Name [the *Shem ha-Meforash*] ten times on Yom Kippur: three times during each of his confessions and once when he cast lots to select the goat to be offered and the one to be sent off. When the goat selected to be sacrificed was identified by lots, the *Kohen Gadol* was [to] say [that] it was sanctified as a sin-offering to God, using the Divine Name.”⁶³

This is extremely important for understanding Yom Kippur in its most complete historical context. However, it does raise the question, how are these elaborate functions maintained or synthesized in today’s worship?

One element which retains the ancient motif is the Torah reading designated for that day. The biblical account of the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16, is read. People living in a much later time and different milieu hear what once had been done on that day. “When the Torah is read, it is said, it is no accident that ch.16 of Leviticus is read. ‘Said Rabbi Yose: It was instituted that this scriptural portion was to be read on Yom Kippur, to make atonement for Israel who are in Exile, because atonement is the order of this day, and because the death of Aaron’s son makes atonement for Israel. (Zohar III. 56b, 57b).”⁶⁴ Based upon this, the great sense of awe is absolutely inseparable from this day. What is created is a view of Yom Kippur that is not frozen in time but rather one that has been dynamic throughout the course of time.

This awe of the day is not only difficult to describe, however; the following prayer is embodies the theology of the day.

⁶³ Kitov, Eliyahu. *The Book of Our Heritage: The Jewish Year and its Days of Significance*. Volume 1 Tisheri-Shevat. 96,97.

⁶⁴ Agnon, Shmuel Yosef. *Days of Awe*. (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1948). 232.

“Our God and God of our fathers, forgive us, pardon us and grant us atonement. For we are Thy people and Thou art our God, We are Thy children and Thou art our Father, We are Thy servants and Thou art our Master, We are Thy congregation and Thou art our Heritage, We are Thine inheritance and Thou art our Portion, We are Thy flock and Thou art our Shepherd, We are Thy vineyard and Thou art our Keeper, We are Thy dependents and Thou art our Deliverer, We are Thy beloved and Thou art our friend, We are Thy treasure and thou art our Dear One, We are Thy subjects and Thou art our *King*, We are pledged to Thee and Thou art pledged to us, *But yet how we fail to measure up to Thee!*”⁶⁵

This prayer shows two primary elements, the first being the covenantal relation between the Lord and Israel, the second being atonement. The covenant between the Lord and his people is one characterized by action and devotion on the part of both. The people are expected to maintain the laws which have been set forth. Naturally, if these are kept, and the people atone for their sins, God is expected to forgive the sins and maintain this special relation with his people.

During the contemporary liturgy for Yom Kippur, two other types of prayers stand out as particularly distinct. These include the prayers for confession of sins and the prayers of remembrance. As I have mentioned earlier, confessing sins is a primary feature of the Day of Atonement.

“For the sin we have committed before Thee under compulsion of our own freewill, For the sin we have committed before Thee by stubbornness of heart, For the sin we have committed before Thee in ignorance, For the sin we have committed before Thee with utterance of our lips, For the sin we have committed before Thee by unchastity, For the sin we have committed before Thee openly or secretly. For the sin we have committed before Thee consciously and deceitfully, For the sin we have committed before Thee by word of mouth...”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Bokser, Ben Zion. *The High Holiday Prayer Book. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. (New York, NY: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1964). 290.

⁶⁶ Bokser, Ben Zion. *The High Holiday Prayer Book. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. 292.

This is an opportunity to discuss the confessional prayers in more depth. These prayers are corporate; they are worded in the first person plural (we), in order to reflect the covenantal nature of the day.

Closely related to this theme is that the people address the Lord by calling on heroic figures of Israel's past.

“For Thou art merciful and accept those who return to Thee. Thou didst promise as in ancient days that Thou wilt accept penitence, and because we repent our sins we are confident that Thou wilt forgive us. Thy servant David said: Who can discern innocent errors? Clear Thou me of hidden faults. Clear us, O Lord of our transgressions, and cleanse us of our impurities. Pour upon us clean waters and make us pure. As Thou didst promise by Thy: I shall pour clean waters upon you, and you will be cleansed of all impurities. Of all your defilements will I cleanse you.”⁶⁷

This prayer is one that reminds God of the covenant he has with Israel. The faithful of the past are seen as having powerful intercession before the Lord. Time and place are no longer the issue, reconciliation is.

The Purpose of Atonement

In this final section, I will draw particular attention to the covenantal aspect of the Day of Atonement. The covenant has always and will always remain at the heart of this day. Although

⁶⁷ Bokser, Ben Zion. *The High Holiday Prayer Book. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. 295.

emphasis may be placed on the individual at points such as prayer or fasting, the community is never separated from the theology of Yom Kippur.

The Sinai covenant was the single definitive event that characterized the relationship between Yahweh God and the people of Israel. Throughout the Hebrew Bible this covenant which was understood in legal terms was also described using diverse imagery. For example, the Sinai covenant, like other covenants of the Ancient Near East is often described as between a king (God) and his servants. “As such, covenant is the instrument constituting the rule (or kingdom) of God, and therefore it is a valuable lens through which one can recognize and appreciate the biblical ideal of religious community.”⁶⁸ Another key manner in which the covenant was understood was that of an unequal partnership. For example, just as ruler would hold the upper hand over his people, so too would God.

God was also understood to have been the principal initiator of this covenant. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:2-3). Since the Lord created the covenant the subsequent blessings and curses were also something that fell to him to enforce as a means of enforcing the covenant. As I had mentioned, the relationship between God and his people was something that was dictated by the covenant.

Thus properly maintaining this covenant was paramount in Ancient Israel. One way in which this was done was the establishment of a communal day for removal and atonement of sin. The Day of Atonement was something that was extremely important for upholding temple

⁶⁸ Mendenhall, George and Herion, Gary A. “Covenant” . *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Freedman, David Noel volume 1. (New York, NY: Doubleday Publishers, 1992).1179.

worship in Ancient Israel. The covenantal aspect of this feast was not only explained scripturally (Leviticus 16:29-34); the covenant aspect was played out through every yearly ritual.

The covenant is of course a strong aspect surrounding every holiday in Judaism, however, the covenantal element of the Day of Atonement is something which is particularly strong. “Thou art a merciful God, Thou art a gracious God. Thy name is linked with us, act for Thy name’s sake, O God. Act for the sake of Thy truth and Thy splendor.”⁶⁹ This is a perfect example of how the covenantal relationship is reflected in the worship. There is a direct connection between atonement and the covenant. When a person, or in this case a nation, is forgiven, they are restored to a proper relation with God.

The Day of Atonement is between the Lord and all of Israel. This adds to the richness of how the day is understood. The richness lies in the fact that there are two essential parts of Yom Kippur. The first and obvious aspect is that of forgiveness; this forgiveness is between the people and God. Likewise, forgiveness also takes place between the individual and God based upon his or her violations of the law. Secondly, the Day of Atonement functions as maintaining Israel’s covenant with God. Sin is something that can damage the divine/human relation; it can incur God’s wrath and anger; forgiveness sets this relation right. Thus, the forgiveness is bound to a national covenant and forgiveness reaffirms that covenant.

⁶⁹ Bokser, Ben Zion. *The High Holiday Prayer Book. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. 296.

Conclusion

The Day of Atonement is a powerfully expressive observance; within it lies a vast amount of teaching reflecting a central theme of Judaism. This idea is none other than the very relationship that the people of Israel have with the Lord. It has been this relation that has been characteristic of Jewish worship throughout history. The Day of Atonement serves the purpose of maintenance; it seeks to fortify the bond which was formed on Mount Sinai. Similarly, the understanding which I have sought to put forth on the Day of Atonement gives particular attention to covenantal duties. The covenant is what formed and shaped Israel's identity, and thus it is only natural that it is honored and respected. I began this chapter by calling attention to the closing verses of Leviticus 16. There, it clearly states that the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) was to be a national day of reconciliation.

The heart of this day is deeply spiritual with messages of repentance from sin and the need to return to the Lord. This all makes for a powerful backdrop for the Day of Atonement and one that has been always been important from the time of Temple to the present. Although the destruction of the Second Temple left a deep rift in Jewish worship, it did not change the theology of Yom Kippur. Although atonement may no longer take place through the medium of animal offerings, atonement itself is still present.

The customs and prayers of this day maintain a strong continuity between the ancient and modern observances. One of these customs is that of the fast accompanying the day. Through practices like fasting, Jews of today enter into a spiritual realm sharing a common bond with those that have gone before. When rules have been established, it is expected that they are maintained. Through the error of human weakness laws have been transgressed. The fast is a

denial that is intended to bring about a rejuvenated status based upon forgiveness. The prayers of Yom Kippur function in a similar manner, by retelling a sacred story and asking for sins to be forgiven. These prayers call to the Lord by reminding him of his covenant with his people.

Upon completion, the community emerges from *Yom Kippur* like one having come out of a darkened tunnel. The atonement which was granted came because of Israel's covenant with God. Life may seem to continue as before, but something is changed. Having repented and having returning to God, the people are strengthened and the covenant has been maintained.

Chapter 3: A New Offering: Jesus

Introduction

Through the previous two chapters of this thesis, I have explained the Day of Atonement from both Biblical as well as later Jewish religious perspectives. Now in an attempt to complete the circle, I shall make it my focus to study the meaning from a Christian perspective. A large part of this section will be devoted to chapters 4-10 of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This letter makes rich usage of priestly images to describe Jesus. Two of the most important connections made are that of contrasting Jesus with the Levitical priesthood, and the sacrifice made on the Day of Atonement and the sacrifice of Jesus.

The first major section is one in which I examine one part of Hebrews 4-10 in particular. Here, I chose to focus my attention on 7:11-19. The attention to this portion of the letter turns to the Biblical character of Melchizedek. Through this section, I study the text's approach to his mysterious origins and the connection of Jesus to the priesthood of Melchizedek.

The next section turns its attention to chapters 4-10 as a whole unit; however I examine it chapter by chapter. I pay close attention to several ideas among them: Jesus and the temple priesthood, and how Jesus is understood as both a fulfillment to and an alternative to temple worship. This section may at first seem to be a departure from earlier parts of the thesis; however, that is not in fact the intention. It is my intention to show how the action of Jesus' death should be understood through the lens of the Jewish and Biblical concept of atonement.

The final section of this chapter attempts to bring reconciliation between Jesus and temple worship. This was in fact an extremely difficult task. Very often Christian scholars sharply contrast Jesus with preexisting Judaic custom. Such approaches show the strength of Jesus and the weakness of Jewish practice, especially that which was in existence in the time of Jesus. This section is not intended to be a definitive statement on this topic; it is intended only to provide insight.

At this point it is important to understand some background information on the epistle to the Hebrews. Scholars tend to date the letter sometime between the mid and late first century. The reason why this is important is because the letter draws on much biblical liturgical imagery. Bearing in mind that the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., information about worship there would have still been fairly recent in the minds of people. Furthermore, the material in the letter seems to support that it was written to both Jewish and Gentile Christians.

There is a great deal that can be said about the authorship of this text. Not only has the intended audience of the letter been debated, but so too has the identity of the writer. The following offers some traditional explanations of author's identity as well as insight into the literary mind.

“From the composition of Hebrews it is possible to draw a number of plausible inferences about the writer. He possessed an architectural mind; he affirms a thesis and then develops it by way of analysis. In antiquity, the names of Paul, Barnabas, Luke, and Clement of Rome were mentioned in certain church centers as the author of Hebrews. In current scholarship, Apollos, Silvanus, the deacon Philip, Priscilla and Aquila, Jude, Aristion,”⁷⁰

⁷⁰Lane, William Lane. *Word Biblical Commentary* Volume 47 A. Hebrews 1-8 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991). Introduction

“The writer may be characterized as an intensely religious man. For him Christianity is an expression of God’s new cultic action. W. G. Johnsson⁷¹ has suggested that cultic categories were ingrained in the subconscious mind of the writer, so that he argues spontaneously from cultic presuppositions such as “blood” as a medium of purgation. Moreover, he lived in a society where cults and cultic sacrifice were common and in which “structures” of thought such as those of defilement, blood, and purgation were the common property of devoutly religious persons. Hebrews proves to be a unique blend of Christology and primitive Christian eschatology within a cultic frame of reference. With the writer’s focus upon the realization of the promised eschatological blessings of the new covenant through the sacrificial accomplishment of Christ, the discourse he prepared becomes a vehicle for challenging exhortation.”⁷²

According to this, the writer was clearly one who was aware of not only a vast array of biblical imagery but customs from the larger Hellenistic world. Furthermore, there were pastoral and theological aims of the writer which become apparent from a close study of Hebrews.

A New Priest, A New Priesthood

The Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the most important texts of the New Testament. Regardless of the intended audience, the letter is aptly named because of its immense Old Testament imagery which it draws upon. Some of this imagery includes how worship and the covenant of the Old Testament are completed in Jesus Christ. The sacrificial worship of the Jerusalem temple takes on a new and heightened meaning through Jesus Christ. One of the most profound passages in Hebrews dealing with this subject is 7:11-19.

⁷¹ Johnsson, W. G. *Hebrews*. Knox Preaching Guides. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980).

⁷² Lane, William. *Word Biblical Commentary* Volume 47 A. Hebrews 1-8. Introduction.

Not only do these verses examine the completion or fulfillment as brought about by Jesus, but they also explain how he brought about a change in the priestly order. The Israelite priestly order was hereditary and offerings, such as those on the Day of Atonement, were made on behalf of the nation of Israel. Jesus was not from a priestly family, yet the offering which he made was on behalf of all humanity.

“The author of Hebrews assumes that the purpose of the cult, in turn, is the perfection (*teliosis*) of the people. If this is lacking, then the cult itself is ineffectual and needs reform or replacement. For Hebrews, perfection is a matter of human transformation rather than cultic transaction”⁷³

Hebrews sees perfection as something signifying spiritual and ethical growth on the part of humanity. Thus, the temple priest was no longer the chief intermediary.

Christ’s sacrifice is seen as both revealing the incompleteness of the temple worship as well as radically altering the human/divine relationship. This New Testament writing speaks of the attitude towards temple worship as being merely ritualistic. Thus, the letter to the Hebrews examines the idea “God has made contact with humans at the most intimate level possible and thus enables humans to enter into contact with God at the most intimate level.”⁷⁴ There are two major aspects to this theology found in Hebrews: 1) Jesus was divine, being the Son of God, and 2) his offering of himself was far superior to any animal offering.

The opening verses of the aforementioned passage allude to the need for change in the priesthood.

⁷³ Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews A Commentary*. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2006). 185.

⁷⁴ Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Hebrews A Commentary*. 186.

“Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.” (Hebrews 7:11-12, ESV).

This begins with the basic understanding that the Levitical priesthood was appointed in the Mosaic Law. However important questions need to be raised; does the action of Christ in itself bring about a change in the law or a change in approach to the law?

It is the next five verses that provide more detail about the change in priesthood. To begin with, it not only gives legitimacy to, but strengthens the understanding of Christ’s power, showing him as eternal.

“For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 7:13-17).

The priestly authority of Jesus draws its source from the symbolic figure of Melchizedek according to the text. Melchizedek is first described in Genesis 14:17-22, where he is seen as a figure without beginning or ending. “With the insertion of the Melchizedek verses in Gn 14 and the identification of El ‘Elyon as Yahweh, Melchizedek was adopted into Israelite tradition. This Jewish adoption of Melchizedek underlies the treatment of him in Heb, for the author knows that

Melchizedek does not share a common ancestry with Abram (7:6).⁷⁵ Thus, Melchizedek is a figure that came to take on a larger persona through time.

Important to the aforementioned section is the contrast between the Levitical priesthood and that of Christ (and Melchizedek). Christ was not born into the priestly tribe, but according to these verses was “raised up according to the order of Melchizedek”: these words are intended to explain that this priesthood in which Christ partakes is higher than that of the temple priesthood. The old priesthood was given through the law by God himself. But Christ being divine has the authority to bring change.

The final verses heighten the incompleteness of the temple priesthood. For only when an institution does not serve its intended purpose, does such an institution need completion.

“On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. ” (Hebrews 7:18-19).

The law and the worship of the temple came to be seen as ineffective in the time of Christ. That “better hope” which the text speaks of is Christ himself.

A theme, not directly stated, but yet prominent in this passage is the eternal nature of this new priesthood. The role which Christ fulfilled through offering himself is something that stands forever. “For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.” (Hebrews 7:28). This is something which stands in harsh contrast to the earthly temple. First of all, there

⁷⁵ Fitzmyer, Joseph A. S.J. *The Semitic Background of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997). 235.

was never a priest that not only encompassed all of Israel but all of humanity. Secondly, the sacrifices were a continual action. It was not until Christ's offering of himself that there would be no further need for sacrifice of any material kind. He brought a fulfillment to both the priestly office and the sacrificial offering. The previously mentioned themes resonate from the very heart of chapters 4-10 in Hebrews. As with the case of other epistles (Romans) the author mentions people who lived prior to the Mosaic law. Here, in this section, it is the person of Melchizedek used as an image for Christ.

It is also perhaps important to understand the letter in terms of its accuracy. Here, I am speaking on one hand of the importance of Christ's priesthood and on the other as to the suppression of the Levitical priesthood. Was this suppression a necessity? Naturally, the circumstances cannot be found in the Mosaic Law as to when or how the Levitical priesthood would be undone. Likewise, Jesus himself although fulfilling the role of priest, did not call for a new priesthood or preach liturgical reform.

Defining the Change

This section of Hebrews (4-10) is a pivotal part, yet it is part of an even much larger whole. Chapters 4 through 10 focus upon the larger issues surrounding the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The principal aspects include the Levitical priesthood as being intermediary, the promises of the old covenant fulfilled in the new, old and new covenant worship and the efficacy of Christ's sacrificial action.

One manner in which the idea of Christ's priesthood is used is his being held up as an example. With "you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession," (3:1), the author makes the transition from the portrayal of Jesus as Son (1:1-4:13; cf. esp. 1:2-14; 2:10-13; 3:1-6) to the role as the great high priest, which he develops in 4:14-10:31."⁷⁶ Thompson continues pointing out the radical distinctions between Christ's priesthood and the Levitical priesthood. The Levitical priesthood is one that is hereditary and earthly, as the author of Hebrews understands it, while Christ's is divine.

Another powerful image taken up by the author of Hebrews is that of physical nourishment. This is a common way of addressing those who have achieved and those who have not achieved spiritual knowledge. This method was a common technique of many Hellenistic writers; it was used by Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."(Hebrews 5:12-14).

The common message here is education and spiritual maturity. Although milk is the lesser of the two substances, it still remains the foundation. One message through chapters 5 and 6 is that even though milk is the initial step, it does not remain the last step and yet even at the higher level the first step is never ignored. The message here of spiritual maturity is a brilliant precursor into final section of chapter 6 regarding promise and fulfillment.

⁷⁶ Thompson, James W. *Hebrews. Commentaries on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). 104.

Hebrews 6:13-20 deals with the powerful ideas of promise and fulfillment. It provides some examples of those who through faith were rewarded.

“The transitional segment is about Abraham, and one of the more astounding rhetorical moves made in this segment that father Abraham serves as the dramatic persona who introduces us to Melchizedek. To understand Melchizedek one must understand the story of Abraham, and to understand Jesus and his tale, one must understand Melchizedek.”⁷⁷

To place this in clearer terms, Melchizedek appears in a narrative sequence about Abraham. Likewise, Jesus is seen as priest here tied to Melchizedek.

A further description of Melchizedek continues in chapter 7 describing the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek.

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.” (Hebrews 7:1-2).

A central feature describing Melchizedek is his office as “King of Salem”. Following the title, a very brief etymology of the name is given.

“The proper name ‘Salem’ is derived from שלום, and Melchizedek becomes ‘king of peace’. Perhaps he introduces the traditional etymology because righteousness and peace evoke messianic imagery thus implying that the figure of Melchizedek refers more to a historical personage in Ancient Canaan.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Witherington III, Ben. *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007). 221.

⁷⁸ Attridge, Harold W. *Hermeneia. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989). 189.

This interpretation seeks to examine the idea that Melchizedek may have been more than simply a symbolic figure. This understanding however is not entirely a solid one. Nevertheless, this author is not choosing to have him defined in folkloric, abstract definitions, but in making him more concrete. Rather he is seeking to define him as a ruler of a locality; that locality is still explained in terms of an idea, peace. As this passage of Hebrews continues, Melchizedek is then defined again in more symbolic manner, as if to fit as a type for Christ. “He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.” (Hebrews 7:3). The author now describes him as a man without beginning or ending.

The opening of chapter 7 continues along these allegorical lines. The main thrust now turns to tithes. The passage states that Levi, through whom the priestly line comes, paid tithes to Melchizedek while in the loins of his forefather Abraham. And Abraham himself had paid tithes to Melchizedek as well. This is all intended as another literary device to proclaim the superiority of Christ’s priesthood which is after that of Melchizedek.

The next major section of the epistle is focused on the change in priesthood. However, the adamant declaration in this change may be a result of the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. “A change in the juridical basis of that priesthood necessarily implies a change in the juridical basis of that priesthood. This in turn implies that the Mosaic law is no longer in force as it was when the Levitical order was the priesthood for the people of God.”⁷⁹ This middle section of chapter 7, which I had previously studied, has two principal ideas: a new form of the priesthood is established, and the priesthood of Jesus is everlasting. The notion of everlasting priesthood is

⁷⁹ Witherington III, Ben. *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*. 245.

taken up in the latter part of chapter 7. “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.” (Hebrews 7:23-24). The natural implication is that the priesthood of Christ must be higher because of its eternal nature. This quality is not something possessed by the temple priesthood.

Chapter 8 explains that the sacrifice of the new high priest (Christ) is superior to that which came before. Although priests may have had the duty of offering animal sacrifices, Christ offered himself. By doing such, Christ initiated something completely new.

“not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Hebrews 8:9-10)

The author of Hebrews is attempting to draw upon imagery of new covenant from the prophet Jeremiah. “This new covenant will involve the innermost relationship to those with whom it was made. This intimate relationship with God in the new covenant will be located not in an interiorization of the Torah but in the cleansing of conscience and worship.”⁸⁰ Based upon this, Attridge sees the new covenant as slightly different from how it is explained in the epistle to the Hebrews, for he appears to be raising the bar even more.

⁸⁰ Attridge, Harold W. *Hermeneia. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. 227

Chapter 9 however makes a contrast between the two covenants. The author begins by making a description of the tabernacle. This description focuses upon the tabernacle on the Day of Atonement.

“Now, we see the tabernacle not on an ordinary day but on a very special day, the annual Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16). On this one day during the year the high priest alone goes beyond the outer tent into the second and inner tent, the Holy of Holies, always taking with as an offering for the sins of his own sins and the sins of the people, a ‘blood’ (that is animal) sacrifice.”⁸¹

It then follows that the atoning actions of the high priest are contrasted with that of Christ. Here again the point is driven home of the higher level of Christ’s offering than that of previous offerings. “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (Hebrews 9:14). Not only was this something new with regard to Judaic tradition, but also the larger religious world. There is an example of a deity who sacrifices himself willingly for the good of all. For as the law was to be treated as a school for the great messianic coming of Jesus Christ, so worship prior to Christ was a large part of this preparation. Worship was to bring about the proper attitude which would be fulfilled in Christ.

Chapter 10 brings together many of the previously mentioned themes of the law and Christ.

“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year.” (Hebrews 10: 1-3).

⁸¹ Long, Thomas G. *Hebrews. Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville, KN: John Knox Press, 1997) 94.

The natural conclusion to be drawn is that the sacrifice of Christ brings an end to all material sacrifices. For Christ has been the perfect offering; there is no need for further sin offerings.

It is important to see how the barrier between God and humanity can only have been bridged by God himself. “The access to God had to be opened by one who came from the other side of the veil. He came from eternity into time and brought eternal sacrifice which could be brought for all. He brought God to man. Thus, through him, there is perpetual access to God.”⁸² According to the text of Hebrews, humanity was not capable of reaching God through other possible means, most especially human means.

The logical question which may still linger in the minds of some is, Why did Christ’s actions succeed where others had failed? There are of course volumes that speak to this subject; however, the short answer is the person of Jesus Christ. He is the divine Son of God and the great High Priest.

“The New Testament writers used a rich variety of symbols taken from the ancient Jewish and Gnostic mythology to interpret the meaning of the cross. It is the task of the doctrine of atonement to explicate the dogmatic meaning of the cross. Here we need only include it as further stage in the kenotic self-abasing movement of the Son of God from the heights of glory to the depths of humiliation...[suffering] a death whose universal redemptive significance has been interpreted according to Jewish ideas of atonement (sacrifice and satisfaction).”⁸³

The sacrifice which he willingly offered brought forth a restoration of all that had gone wrong.

⁸² *The Broadman Bible Commentary*. Volume 12. General Articles Hebrews-Revelation. “Hebrews”. Charles A. Trentham. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972). 73-74.

⁸³ *Christian Dogmatics*. Carl Braaten, editor. Robert W. Jenson, editor. Gerhard O. Forde, Hans Schwarz, Philip J. Hefner, Paul Sponheim. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984) 547, 548.

It is also important at this time to reexamine the meaning of word *kipper* in the light of Christ's sacrifice. As I pointed out in a previous chapter, an earlier Arabic cognate form of the term is defined as "to contain or conceal". This old, perhaps discarded meaning, becomes illumined as one studies the uniqueness and newness of Jesus' priestly office. One possible explanation which may have suited early Christians about Temple worship, can be that sins are contained until the coming of the Messiah. Jesus Christ, being the Messiah and fulfillment of prophetic hopes, came to restore and to forgive the sins of all. Although this definition may seem adequate on a theological level, it is not complete on a practical level. It does not speak to the reality that the covenant which God made on Sinai with the people of Israel still exists. Likewise, the need for atonement was not the offering of animal sacrifices but to maintain a relationship with God.

Reconciliation Between Jesus and the Temple

A drawback of the Epistle to the Hebrews is that unlike the Epistle to the Romans, it does not respect the importance of the Sinai covenant. Hebrews regards this covenant as old, out of date and desperately in need of replacement. Furthermore, the worship is described as merely ritualistic. There are many sayings in which Jesus spoke of the temple such as the following placing it in a negative light. "And as he came out of the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." (Mark 13:1-2).⁸⁴ A saying such as this needs to be analyzed in a

⁸⁴ The Greek text uses the term καταλυθῆ (katalythy) which comes from the verb καταλέω (kataléo), meaning to stone to death.

Liddel Scott Greek-English Lexicon. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998). 898

literary critical manner. For example, the message fits with the greater theme of social justice common to Jesus' ministry; it also stands as somewhat unique. In short, Jesus taught and healed; although prophetic messages are found in his teachings, this condemnatory message stands out. These are words directed right at the temple.

Another equally important passage to examine is Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, (Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-46 and John 2:13-17). These passages all show Jesus' anger with practices around the temple, not the temple itself.

“If Jesus were a religious reformer, however bent on correcting ‘abuse’ and ‘present practice’, we should hear charges of immorality, dishonesty and corruption directed *against the priests*. On the contrary, the attack was against the trade which is necessary for sacrifices no matter who are the priests and without mention of the *halakot* which they follow. Thus, it appears that Jesus' demonstration was against what all would have seen as necessary to the sacrificial system, rather than against the present practice.”⁸⁵

There is a very fine line between condemning a needed practice for the Temple and the Temple itself. Based upon the texts themselves, Jesus is clearly speaking against the abuses in buying and selling and not Temple ritual itself. “And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.” (Luke 19:45-46). Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7, coming from a larger section which deals with social justice. The prophet first declares the sanctity of the Temple, “my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples”, and addresses the gathering of all people in worship. This theme was something found in much prophetic literature, that is, worship not being made accessible to all. It is this very thing which Jesus himself is condemning.

⁸⁵ Sanders, E.P. *Jesus and Judaism*. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985). 66.

Here we read what may appear to be extreme actions by Jesus; however they are actions very much in line with Jewish prophets. It is important to see that there is continuity. As I have stated Jesus' anger is not with the Mosaic Law itself, or the Temple, but rather the manner in which it was being abused. I wish to draw a parallel between this and idea of newness or continuity of Jesus' actions. The same logic can be applied to Jesus' action of atonement; is this something completely new or continuing the ancient atonement ritual? I shall explain that his sacrifice carries with it both elements.

Although it is true that Hebrews mentions little about the value of the Sinai covenant, this must be viewed in a proper perspective. There are ideas which seek to place a radical distinction between Judaism and Christianity. These may in fact be reflective of the time, but the role of Christ in the letter still remains paramount.

So can reconciliation be made between these two covenants and how they understand atonement? This can occur only if the individual allows for differences and does not view their tradition in a way that suppresses one or the other (i.e. the Christian person can hold his or her beliefs without feeling superior to a follower of Judaism). The Epistle to the Hebrews needs to be placed in its proper context. With its major theme of Christology, the letter was written as a message of hope to persecuted Christians. Those that are suffering for the faith are neither to abandon their faith nor to follow Judaic practices.

Thus, the epistle may overemphasize, it points to a common element to literature composed in periods of persecution. In other words, it is very easy for this text to be misinterpreted, because of the strong language it uses. It does not merely proclaim the greatness of Jesus' action; it proclaims the superiority. It may become very easy for one to overlook the

fact that covenant with Israel still exists, and that the worship of Temple played an important role in the development of the doctrine of atonement.

A full understanding of Jesus' sacrificial act is best seen in the light of the Day of Atonement. The Epistle to the Hebrews states not only the power of this sacrifice, but also the radical newness of it; and this is very much true. The action of a sacrifice being made to atone for the sins of many comes from the Day of Atonement. In addition, Christians need to realize that Jesus' sacrifice contains the major elements of the Day of Atonement.

At this point I would like to propose an understanding of atonement that does justice to both Leviticus and Hebrews. It was mentioned in the previous chapter (and earlier in this one as well) that one possible definition of *kipper* is to contain or conceal. Thus, the Day of Atonement contained the sins of the people until the coming messiah. Jesus being the promised messiah brings perfect forgiveness. Likewise, the efficacy of the Day was something which was not merely dependent upon ritual formulae but on love, sincere repentance and social justice. Due to the fact that these were rarely in full practice explains all the more why forgiveness may not have fully been given.

Furthermore, I would like to return to the covenantal aspect which I gave attention to in the previous chapter. There I mentioned how a major component of the Jewish understanding of *Yom Kippur* is centered around the Sinai covenant. This only intensifies through the New Testament view of atonement. Whereas in the past atonement was made on behalf of a people in accordance with their mandate from God, now it is Jesus Christ who brings a more complete atonement, that being for all humanity.

A powerful image used throughout scripture is that of an offering made without blemish (Lev 14:10; Num 6:14 Ezek 46:13 and 1 Peter 1:19). However, in the epistle to the Hebrews the offering which has been made is not only a blameless sacrifice but also part of God's restoration of humanity. "He fulfills, in his dying, all the functions of sacrifice. Thus, the once for all character of Christ's sacrifice, is particularly connected in the epistle with the putting away of sins."⁸⁶ The sacrifices of the Jerusalem temple were intended to solidify elements of a broken relation between God and humanity. This bond which was damaged through Adam was made anew through Jesus Christ.

The language of Leviticus does not make mention of an atoning sacrifice as being forever; rather it is a custom repeated annually. Hebrews makes this sharp distinction blatantly obvious, the sacrifice of Jesus was not something temporary, but done once and for all. "This book asserts that Christ is to be distinguished from Moses and Aaron, and his salvation from theirs in kind rather than in degree. Often the context indicates that the comparative terminology is really an understated form of [the] superlative."⁸⁷ There is little doubt that the language and terminology in Hebrews is extreme. A reading of the text can give one the idea that the Sinai covenant is one that has been nullified by Christ. A reading, or perhaps a misreading of Hebrews, can add to the raging tension of Christian suppression of Judaism.

This notion of Christians suppressing Jewish ideas, particularly those linked to Christianity, is something which deep in history. "Mainstream Christianity held onto the major tradition that upheld the Church as successor to the People of Israel."⁸⁸ Thus, in the mind of the

⁸⁶ McDonald, H.D. *The New Testament Concept of Atonement*. (James Clarke & Co., 1994). 80

⁸⁷ Dunhill, John. *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*. (Cambridge University Press, 1992). 230.

⁸⁸ Wistrich, Robert S. *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism and Xenophobia*. (Amstelijk, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers). 132.

average Christian, Jewish teaching served no value despite the fact that Christianity itself grew out of Judaism. In fact the Christian Old Testament, as texts, endured much scrutiny before being accepted into the canon of scripture. The heretic Marcion desired to remove vast parts of the Old Testament from the canon altogether. He understood the god of the Old Testament as different from the Father of Jesus Christ. “Christian theology did not pardon the Jews for the death of Jesus and was rather reluctant to recognize its debt to Judaism. Moreover, numerous attempts were made, through sophisticated exegesis of Scripture, to reduce the importance of the Jewish contribution to Christianity.”⁸⁹ Although throughout the centuries Jewish communities fervently clung to their identity, Christians not only wanted to squash this but also any theological connection between the two.

Returning to Hebrews, despite its apparently harsh anti-ritual tone, the letter does in fact raise other ideas. One of the most paramount notions to the epistle is Christology. Hebrews by itself was aimed at saying more. Although the sentiment against Judaism cannot be ignored, it is not the only message. Before going further, I will briefly examine the complex dynamic of early Christianity.

Early Christianity was something composed of rich diversity. Many of the very first Christians were Jews, and in fact saw their faith and worship as renewed Judaism. Many would attend both Sabbath and Eucharistic services. Thus, the exact religious identity of these first Christians was difficult to place, as they saw themselves belonging to two groups or perhaps seeing themselves as part of the larger entity of Judaism. As the faith of Christianity spread, there came to be more and more Gentile followers. To the Christian, Judaism remained an ethnic,

⁸⁹ Wistrich, Robert. *Demonizing the Other*. 132.

national faith while Christianity crossed these boundaries.⁹⁰ This attitude did not develop overnight but grew as the Christian “teaching” grew. A major gulf developed between Jews and Christians; as the Church became the state religion, it only continued.

Through the writing and compiling of the New Testament the Christian community which took shape had a different attitude than the first Christians. The emerging Christian Church found it difficult to see Judaism as the faith of Jesus. One of the most significant factors culminating in the break between Judaism and Christianity was the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Christians interpreted this event in the light of prophecies made by Jesus, (Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2, and Luke 21:5-9). Furthermore, the Jewish community would lose its cultural and religious center through this event. Judaism appeared defeated in the eyes of many Christians. Sadly, this separation and subsequent views of Christian triumphalism became a reality of history. Certain parts of the epistle to the Hebrews may reflect this sentiment.

As I have stated earlier, this section was not aimed at bringing full theological reconciliation between Jews and Christians; rather I am attempting to offer insight as to why and how certain trends developed. Ultimately these trends would become commonplace. How a person dates the letter to the Hebrews is critical for understanding this situation. The destruction of the Temple is naturally used as major point in helping to date Hebrews. Attridge for example, gives two possible dates, something he credits to language and syntax. He states that the letter could have been composed close to 115 A.D. or a period between 60 and 100 A.D. The earlier date is suggested only because of the rich imagery describing Temple worship, as well as a lack of explicit reference to the Temple’s destruction. However, if the later date is taken as correct, it

⁹⁰ *Jewish Christianity Rediscovered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*. edited by Matt Jackson-McCabe. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007). 15.

would give insight as to why Jesus is portrayed as being superior to the High Priest and the offering. Yet this too was perhaps made to reflect a larger theological idea of Jesus fulfilling the role of offering and priest.

I have covered many items in this final section. Despite all the issues surrounding the style and language of Hebrews; the letter should not be reduced to being merely a Christian attempt to suppress Jewish theology. Hebrews itself contains many important themes such as Christology, and one manner in which this is expressed is through Jesus Christ as High Priest. Similarly, the connection to the priesthood of Melchizedek is a testament proclaiming his divinity.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this final chapter to show another stage in the development of atonement. Although this stage brings a type of completion to atonement, it is of course important to see this as one part in a larger picture, albeit an important element. Essentially a new idea came forth, but that had its roots in earlier tradition.

This chapter had three principal sections to it. The first part took a look at a possible connection between Jesus and Melechizedek, with reference to Hebrews. Jesus is described in the Epistle to the Hebrews as being part of the priestly order of Melchizedek. The important element in the second section is that one can see how writers of the New Testament used Old Testament terminology to illustrate an idea. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, writes of Jesus making an offering of himself for the atonement of all. This offering is contrasted with the offering made by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The final section of this chapter was intended to try to bring a possible reconciliation between the Jewish and Christian views of atonement. My purpose in this last part was to understand atonement in a manner that could perhaps be loyal to both Judaism and Christianity. This was very difficult, since, as I stated, much literature from the Christian perspective is written in a way that pays little attention to the Jewish understanding of atonement.

The reason that I felt that such a task was important was because it was from the Jewish mindset that the scriptures of New Testament were composed. To ignore this or to suppress this in any way fails to see the full picture. A crucial aspect of atonement is the covenantal relationship of a community and God. Based upon the Jewish perspective, atonement takes place for the nation of Israel, whereas in the Christian perspective it has taken place for all mankind.

General Conclusion

At this point I would like to place many of the ideas presented into perspective. One cannot estimate the great need which the world has for atonement due to sin. Sin is not simply one isolated action; it is cosmic with far reaching effects, rupturing the human/divine relationship. The reason for this is that sin itself is a rebellion against God. He created the universe and set things in a particular order; sin is an act of defiance of this order. The sin committed by Adam put humanity upon a dangerous road. It set in motion a series of events in salvation history that needed to occur.

The study of atonement may pose some confusion especially related to the need for atonement. Atonement rituals very often involved some type of ritual sacrifice; which may lead some to believe that through scripture God constantly needs to be appeased by bloody offerings. Here there is one key item which needs be stated; God is complete in himself and not in need of anything, least of all sacrifice. The principal focus of the offering is maintaining a proper relationship between the Lord and humanity. During the ritual offerings humanity offers back to God selected elements of his creation.

This notion begins to show just how great atonement is. The rituals of the Day of Atonement had two primary objectives, both of which were inseparable. The Day of Atonement was to provide one day for the atonement and removal of sin. "The direct concern of the priests, with the ritual, was to purify the Temple and prevent the departure of Yahweh. But since it was sin that caused most of the impurity, and since the ritual is carried [out] 'because of their transgressions, of all their sins' (Lev 16:16), then we must say that the ritual also has to do with expunging sin. By cleansing the holiest symbols (the sacred installations of the Temple), the high

priest is also ‘making atonement for himself and for the people.(Lev 16:24)’⁹¹ This idea presented by Finlan returns to the idea I put forth in my first chapter.

Equally important for atonement, and necessary is the ritual of the scapegoat. It is understood that the sins of the people pass directly onto the goat. “Furthermore, this goat is ritually maltreated- its hair is pulled, it is cursed, pierced, spat upon, things that are never done to a sacrificial animal.”⁹² Thus, the treatment of this goat became an image for the purpose it was intended. The location to where the goat was sent is of significant importance. The text of Leviticus itself is rather vague saying merely ‘for Azazel’. Although there are scholars who hold to the idea that the name Azazel refers to a demon, this is unclear. What is clear is that it was intended for the removal of sin.

Yet throughout this thesis, deep concerns weighed on my mind, such as how to explain the uniqueness of both Jesus and the Temple sacrifice as well as what linked them. To the early Jewish Christians, the death of Jesus Christ could be explained in terms of the atonement sacrifice. “They could appreciate references to blood as cleansing and to death as a means of putting away sins. And what was no more dimly hinted at in the case of the animals they could see perfectly accomplished in Christ.”⁹³ It is no accident then that the Epistle to the Hebrews, with its rich use of Temple imagery, explains offerings as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

One can see not only a type/fulfillment relation between Christ and the atonement offering but the scapegoat as well. The goat “for Azazel” was mistreated prior to being led out of

¹ Finlan, Stephen. *Problems With Atonement: The Origins of and Controversy About Atonement Doctrine*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005). 17.

² Finlan, Stephen. *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007). 13.

⁹³ Morris, Leon. *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*. (Downers Groves, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983). 83.

the community. The same was true in the treatment of Jesus before his death and ultimately dying outside the walls of Jerusalem. The goat “for the Lord” however was a perfect unblemished offering. This too was another element of Christ’s death; he was the perfect offering. Thus, the action of Jesus instituted something monumental between God and man forever.

I began in the introduction by stating why atonement had sparked my interest. I essentially see atonement as a theme which encompasses all of scripture, as I had stated. It was from this idea that I saw atonement as a complex issue and one that developed in stages, and only by understanding the stages for what they were can atonement be fully understood. Likewise, I mentioned how fascinated I was with the Jewish theological roots of Christianity. Throughout my work on this thesis it remained an intense interest of mine; yet through further study of the Christian perspective of atonement, it was difficult to reconcile the two approaches.

This difficulty to reconcile was something that became particularly apparent to me through the study of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Although this is written with poetic language, it still reflects the predominant Christian doctrine that Jesus Christ was the sacrifice and that all others only give a rough glimpse. Through the research that went into this portion of the thesis, I gained a deeper appreciation for both the Christian approach as well as the wording of Hebrews.

This work as a whole could stand as a significant work in the discipline of Biblical Theology. This thesis seeks in one way to bridge gaps, gaps that through the course of history have been ripped further and further apart. I refer here predominantly to how not only Jewish and Christian theologies have engaged one another, but particularly how Christian theology has regarded Judaism. The prevailing Christian view for centuries has been that Christianity is the

triumph and there is no need for anything else. And this view is only true on a limited theological view. Any type of reconciliation I did had to be done by other means.

The great positive component of this work, I feel, was my ability to both look at the Jewish scholarly writings and the New Testament without taking an approach of triumphalism or anti-Semitism. Most importantly, I feel that this thesis presents the groundwork, in a specific area, for possible dialogue between Jewish and Christian theologians. Another positive aspect which I hope could be gained from this work is a successful presentation of atonement as a process in theological development, and that the best manner for understanding it is to view the whole picture.

Despite the lengthy work which went into this thesis it is not an end of itself. The dominant issue which still remains is that of the reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity. Although I had explained that it was not my intention to answer all questions, I still feel the area needs further study. The range of theological diversity between Judaism and Christianity is immensely diverse. This portion of the thesis was very difficult to tackle. Due to the difference between the two faiths it was difficult to create a more complete solution. Much in the area of Christian-Jewish relations is and will remain incomplete for some time.

The area of atonement is but one area where the two faiths will continue to be at odds. The most important idea about atonement is that it is a process and developed theologically over time. Although it has roots in the ancient Near East, it began to take shape in the narrative of Leviticus 16 and continued through Jewish writings culminating with Jesus Christ in Hebrews. In fact, the one true constant throughout history has been the need for atonement; maintaining a right relation with God.

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